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SUBJECT The Papal Plot

ROGER MUDD: There's new evidence linking Bulgaria to a plot to assassinate the Pope in May 1981.

According to the "New York Times," a Bulgarian official who defected to France shortly after the Pope was shot claims the Soviet intelligence agency organized the assassination attempt, and the Bulgarian Secret Service contacted Mammet Ali Agca, the man who shot the Pope.

As Marvin Kalb reports tonight, the Reagan Administration is not pleased with the way three CIA agents in Rome are handling the Bulgarian connection.

MARVIN KALB: At the U.S. Embassy in Rome, the three top CIA officials are in deep trouble. The station chief and his two deputies whom U.S. law prohibits us from identifying are the subject of a secret investigation in Washington, and they may soon be fired because, according to key Administration sources, they appear to have deliberately disobeyed presidential orders about the Papal plot.

The orders came on more than one occasion from National Security Adviser William Clark and CIA Director William Casey that the three officials in Rome were to stop discrediting the so-called Bulgarian Connection, and yet they continued, infuriating senior officials in the Administration.

Why?

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There are two theories. First, that the CIA officials in Rome maintained an embarrassing close working relationship with an Italian labor leader, Luigi Swichelo[?]* now arrested as a Bulgarian spy, and, second, that they might have been using a guns and drug smuggling route between Sofia, Bulgaria and Milan, Italy to run their own agents into Eastern Europe, and they don't want anyone looking into either theory.

There is a third possibility, though, reluctantly raised by some U.S. officials, that the CIA operation in Italy might have been compromised which accounts for the swift high-level investigation launched in Washington.

Marvin Kalb, NBC News, New York.

* Correct spelling - Luigi Scricciolo